

# Absorptive Meditation and Vipassana

Dhamma Teaching by Luang Por Jamnian Seelasettho May 2020, Malaysia

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## Absorptive Meditation

Absorptive Meditation brings in tranquility, leading to an altered state of consciousness or jhana. Lokiya Jhana consists of four levels of form jhana and four levels of formless jhana. The absence of mental phenomena in the highest state of formless jhana leads to misunderstanding that one has entered Nibbana. This was a common misunderstanding in meditators before the Buddha's enlightenment. This form of jhana can be likened to sleep. When you wake up, everything returns as it was before. Absorptive meditation only brings tranquility and the transient voidness of mental phenomena but not the elimination of defilements, cravings, attachment to the five aggregates, or attachment to self. When mental phenomena have been suppressed for some time, some practitioners may mistakenly think all defilements have been eradicated and Arahantship has been achieved.

There was a story of the three fire-worshiper brothers (Uruvela-kassapa, Nadi-kassapa and Gaya-kassapa) who mistakenly thought that they had attained Arahantship even though they still practice fire worshipping rituals. With the misconception that formless jhana was Arahantship, Uruvela-kassapa claimed he had attained Arahantship in front of the Buddha. It took the Buddha several months to show them right view. The Buddha taught the fire-worshippers about the burning fire of lust, hatred, and delusion of the six sense doors (eye, nose, ear, tongue, body, and mind). Subsequently, the three fire-worshippers with their 1,000 followers attained Arahantship.

**Lokiya Jhana** attained from absorptive meditation is still imbued with attachment to the concept of self and the five aggregates. This altered state of consciousness possesses a self-identification view.

*First Jhana:* thought, direction of thought, evaluation of thought, and singleness of mind. I am one with or become the thought. I am one with or become the singleness of mind.

*Second Jhana:* I am one with rapture, one with happiness, and one with the singleness of mind in rapture.

*Third Jhana:* I am one with happiness as the singleness of mind.

*Fourth Jhana:* I am one with equanimity. My mind becomes one with equanimity. There is still a self-identification view.

Lokiya Jhana is subject to decline. Phra Devadatta, cousin, and the Buddha's nemesis could levitate due to his psychic ability attained from high levels of Lokiya Jhana. Consequently, when he lost his jhanic power, he lost his ability to levitate.

Attachment to tranquility in deep absorptive mediation is likened to boulders sitting on top of grasses, preventing them to grow. When the boulders are removed, the grasses can grow back. Similarly, absorptive meditation can temporarily suppress defilements. When one is out of the jhanic state, defilements can roar back to life. Some practitioners may mistakenly think that Arahantship has been attained after a prolonged period of defilement suppression.

There is a self-identification view in absorptive jhana which is still imbued with attachment to the five aggregates. Lokiya Jhana is still attached to worldly conditions of gain, loss, fame, obscurity, blame, praise, happiness, and pain/suffering. It is still clinging to sensual pleasures and does not lead the way to the end of suffering.

### **Vipassana**

Vipassana practice can bring the mind into Lokuttara or supermundane level by liberating it from worldly concepts. The ultimate result is Nibbana, the relinquishment of suffering, and no more endless rebirth into the Samsara. **Lokuttara Jhana** sees the altered states of consciousness without attachment to self: we are not one with jhana. Jhana is a mere sensation separate from the Pure Knowing. There is neither self-identification view nor attachment to the five aggregates. Lokuttara Jhana is not subject to decline. Tranquility observed in Lokuttara Jhana is without defilements.

**Vipassana ñāṇa** or insight knowledge possesses clear insight and can see through the ultimate truth in all Dhamma. Once you discover the Pure Knowing, use it to know ("understand"), experience ("see"), practice ("develop"), relinquish, and then liberate. Cultivate these five mental qualities in your practice. Once you "understand", let it go; once you "see", let it go. Once you have developed from practicing, let it go. Do so without any attachment to the concept of self. This will give rise to *pañña ñāṇa* or intuitive knowledge that can see the arising, existing and passing away of all phenomena and can relinquish them without any clinging or attachment. Once we are on the path of Lokuttara, suffering can be extinguished. The mind can see through worldly concepts and move out of self-view into non-self-view or anatta. The mind will possess a stable and unwavering power.

The Buddha found his **ñāṇa** or **the Pure Knowing**, when he was enlightened. This is **the Eye of Wisdom**: *cakkhu-karani* (producing vision) and *ñāṇa-karani* (producing knowledge).

*"Aneka jati samsaram , sandhavissam anibbisam,  
Gahakarakam gavesanto dukkha-jati-punappunam,  
Gahakaraka,ditthosi, puna gehamna kasati,*

*Sabba te phasuka bhagga, gahakutam visankhitam,  
Visankharagatam cittam, tanhanam khayamajjihaga”*

*“Through many a birth, I wandered in samsara, but did not find the builder of the house.  
Sorrowful it is, to be born again and again. Oh housebuilder, thou art seen.  
Thou shall build no house again. All the rafters are broken. The ridge/pole is shattered.  
My mind has attained the unconditioned. The end of craving is achieved “*

In our practice, Luang Por advises us to fully comprehend the Pure Knowing, ManoDhamma, and the Citta<sup>1</sup>.

When the mind is in the Middle Way, the knowing element will spontaneously abide in the location above the citta. When at the Mano’s location, ManoDhamma can train and purify the citta without getting entangled.

*“Mano pubbangama Dhamma Mano settha Mano maya,  
Manasa ce paduttthena bhasati va karoti va.  
Tato nam dukkhamanveti cakkamva vahato padam”*

*“All mental phenomena have the mind as their forerunner;  
they have the mind or Mano as their chief; they are mind-made.  
If one speaks or acts with an evil mind, dukkha follows  
like the wheel follows the hoofprint of the ox that draws the cart “*

In the citta, 121 types of consciousness are buried in the subconscious. Also, there are sañña: memory or perception and sañkhāra: fabrications which can be wholesome, unwholesome or absorptive. Both wholesomeness and unwholesomeness reside in the citta along with cravings and clinging to the aggregates which when further fabricated by sañkhāra result in Bhava (state of beings) or rebirths.

Viññāṇa or the knowing element, though deathless, is under the influence of sañkhāra. The arising of sañkhāra from Asava<sup>2</sup> and in turn the arising of viññāṇa from sañkhāra are depicted in the concept of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda).

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<sup>1</sup> Luang Por mentioned that a mind state depends on the location where the knowing element abides. When the knowing element moves to the location of the Pure Knowing (the Eye of Wisdom) located between the eyebrows, the Pure Knowing can investigate all phenomena arising from the lower bases without entanglement. Further down will be the location of Mano Dhamma (throat level), then the location of Citta (heart level).

<sup>2</sup> Asava: the predilections or karmic propensities in the citta

An arahant abides in the Pure Knowing or the Wisdom Eye, not in ManoDhamma or the citta. For the mind to be fully liberated, the knowing element needs to be separated from the subjects being cognized. The knowing element needs to be relinquished from the other four aggregates: form, sensations, memory or perception, and fabrication.

The practitioners should abide in mindfulness (*sati*), sustained mindfulness (*mahasati*), wisdom (*pañña*), intuitive knowledge (*pañña ñāṇa*) and *pañña vimutti* - the wisdom associated with the fruition of liberation. Let go of attachment to either wholesomeness or unwholesomeness since both are still subject to impermanence, dissatisfaction, and non-self. Stay in the path of the Middle Way, until reaching Nibbana. Let go of everything until only the Pure Knowing remains, completely separated from those subjects being cognized. No more state of being (*Bhava*) and no more rebirths.

In our pursuit of liberation, there are four paths, four fruits, and one Nibbana. Nibbana is beyond the three characteristics of existence and beyond worldly concepts. No arising and passing away and no suffering. Only one liberated knowing element remains. There is no duality.

Only your mindfulness, wisdom, and perfections can lead the way to Nibbana. In your practice, keep contemplating whether there would still be suffering if there exists only the knowing element without any subject to be cognized. Suffering stems from root causes. However, in Nibbana, despite the presence of root causes, there is no suffering, no sorrow, no mundane happiness, and not even equanimity.

The word Nibbana came from *Nibba* (cessation) and *vana* (cycle). Nibbana is the cessation of the cycle of rebirths. There is only the knowing element, liberated from all worldly concepts.

One may achieve Arahantship by the deliverance of the mind (**ceto vimutti**) powered by concentration or the deliverance of wisdom (**pañña vimutti**) from developing clear insight followed by the relinquishment of attachments. It takes less time to attain enlightenment through *pañña vimutti* than through *ceto vimutti*. The Lord Buddha was enlightened through *pañña vimutti*. A Buddha with supra perfection in wisdom (*pañña*) like the Lord Buddha gets enlightened faster than a Buddha with supra perfection in *Saddha* (convictions) or *Viriya* (efforts).

Therefore, you should know that absorptive meditation only brings tranquility. Let go of tranquility to further develop wisdom (*pañña*). Do not be heedless by staying in *Lokiya* states and not moving on to *Vipassana*. The Buddha warned us not to be heedless.

In the Lord Buddha 's parting words:

*“All fabrications are subject to decay. Bring about completion by being heedful.”*

Have a complete understanding that absorptive meditation does not result in Nibbana because, even in tranquility, there is still an attachment to the concept of self and clinging to the five aggregates.

Let go of the worldly concept of self-identification view and move on to the supramundane of anatta or non-self. See the eighteen elements of the six sense doors just the way they really are without any attachment to self. Just observe and let them function on their own. Use equanimity to let go of things until only the Pure Knowing remains.

Once there is only the Pure Knowing left, that is Nibbana: the goal of the practice. There is no suffering in the Pure Knowing. The clinging to the five aggregates has been relinquished. Worldly concepts are replaced with the ultimate truth. In the end, there will only be the knowing element in eternity. No more arising or passing away.